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Soviet Cheating

When a blue-ribbon panel informed President Reagan last November of Soviet arms control treaty violations, it suggested the Kremlin was testing how much cheating the Americans would swallow. That puts in ominous perspective the seven months since then.

One unintended partial answer to the degree of U.S. tolerance is that 275-page document still under lock and key as "secret." It has been kept from Congress by the White House and may never be delivered to Capitol Hill. That is ominous since the report by the president's General Advisory Committee on Arms Control (GAC) goes far beyond any routine new charge of massive cheating to suggest "peculiar properties" in the Kremlin's political and military rationale for its violations. One of the "peculiar properties" is that Soviet cheating is partly designed to "test . . . U.S. political processes" on arms control.

Under the heading, "Further Significance of Recent Soviet Breaches" of treaties, the GAC report suggests that cheating may in part be a Soviet tool to register levels of American anger or acquiescence to Soviet non-compliance. "What they may be probing for," one official told us, "is the true level of American toleration for their cheating."

That tolerance level has been high by any fair accounting. For example, when the Soviets were discovered to be developing a new heavy SS19 ICBM at the very time they were about to sign the first SALT agreement—which ruled out new "heavy" ICBMs—the United States only complained.

The White House rejected efforts to use the GAC re-

port in a closed-door session the Senate held last month to discuss latest U.S. intelligence on Soviet anti-satellite technology. If it had been unveiled at that session, it could have stimulated a harsh new anti-Soviet diatribe and undermined efforts to arrange new U.S.-Soviet arms talks before Nov. 6. White House legal aides ruled it out even for a secret Senate session because of "executive privilege." That was an answer of sorts to the Soviet test.

Another rationale for persistent Soviet refusal to abide by either the letter or the spirit of its nuclear and other military agreements, according to the report, is "to test . . . U.S. intelligence capabilities." Development of the SS19 was discovered by extraordinarily successful satellite-based bugging of the late Soviet president Leonid Brezhnev's limousine. The Kremlin quickly uncovered this U.S. breakthrough when Washington complained that the SS19 looked like a SALT violation.

The GAC report makes a strong case that Soviet decisions to engage in widespread SALT II violations seem to have been "initiated at about the time" the never-ratified treaty was signed in 1979. Moreover, the United States should have known from the start. Encryption of test data on new missiles, a violation of SALT II, is described by the report as "done in a fashion which should have at least caused U.S. suspicion."

Authors of the GAC report paint an even gloomier view of the future. They claim that "the expanding Soviet national concealment and deception program may have been a preparation or a cover for more extensive violations taking place now or to take place in the future." The clear aim: cheat to win.

That raises a profound question of administration policy on the current plans for anti-satellite warfare talks at Vienna with the Russians. U.S. specialists argue there is no way to verify an anti-satellite warfare ban. Concealment of tests is as easy as concealment of new data from missile testing: by encryption.

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